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and Dead Soldiers of Harvard University,  
July 21, 1865

*By* HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL

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ON July 21, 1865, Harvard College held a great commemorative service for those of its sons who had served the nation during the Civil War—to welcome home and pay homage to the survivors of its band of 590 alumni who had enlisted in the conflict and even more to honor the memory of those 99 noble sons who gave up their lives in their country's cause. It was the greatest day the college ever saw—the greatest celebration ever known since the foundation of the university.<sup>1</sup>

Next to the spontaneous, moving prayer delivered by Phillips Brooks at the church services in the morning—of which no record now remains—the most inspiring utterance of that day was the *Ode* recited in the late afternoon by James Russell Lowell. All else of that glorious occasion has long since been forgotten, but that *Commemoration Ode* still lives on.

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Vaughan Bail. *Harvard's Commemoration Day, July 21, 1865*. In: *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. XV, June, 1942, pp. 256-279.

It was probably the third week in May that Professor Francis J. Child, chairman of the sub-committee in charge of the music and services for the ceremonies, asked Lowell to write this poem — evidently to be the grand peroration of the day. Lowell, at that time Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literatures, and Professor of Belles-Lettres, was the logical selection for such a part in the program. He was still Harvard's most distinguished poet, although, as he himself had written a few years before, "while my lectures are on my mind I am not myself, and I seem to see all the poetry drying out of me."<sup>2</sup> Although his early poetic freedom and abandon had largely passed and although he had produced few poems during the war, in the few he had written — particularly in the *Biglow Papers, Second Series* — he had reached his earlier heights. But that which made Lowell's selection primarily fitting was his very closeness to the struggle. His naturally patriotic emotions had been at white heat during the entire four years of conflict, especially after the death in action of his three favorite nephews. Nobody else could so well speak in exalted verse for those whom that Commemoration Day was to honor. As far as Lowell himself was concerned it was fortunate, as Abbot Lawrence Lowell points out, that he was asked to deliver this *Ode*, for it may be doubted whether this, the grandest of his poems, would ever have been produced without the spur of necessity.<sup>3</sup>

Many have been the stories told of the great stress and strain under which Lowell composed his poem, after he had once accepted Child's invitation. Lowell himself describes or mentions its composition on a number of occasions. The most dramatic although obviously the most tenuous of these stories is that told to Horace E. Scudder about 1900 by Mrs. S. B. Herrick. On the evening before the celebration, with his poem still unwritten,

<sup>2</sup> Letter to W. J. Stillman dated May 14, 1857, printed in *Letters of James Russell Lowell* edited by Charles Eliot Norton, New York, 1894; I, p. 278. (Hereafter entitled *Letters*.)

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Historical Society. *Proceedings*, 2nd Series; XI, p. 91.

Lowell said to his wife: "I must write this poem tonight. Go to bed and do not let me feel that I am keeping you up, and I shall be more at ease." He began it at ten o'clock. At four in the morning he came to her door and said: "It is done and I am going to sleep now." She opened her eyes to see him standing haggard, actually wasted by the stress of labor and the excitement which had carried him through a poem of passion and fire, of 523 lines in the space of six hours.<sup>4</sup> This is the story which will doubtless be told through the years, but even so the actual facts should also be related.

It might be said that Lowell had really been working on his *Ode* for four years. Edward Everett Hale points out that the inspiration had come from day to day during the long years of the war and he poured out in the poem what he had been thinking and feeling, in joy and sorrow, in hope and fear, in learning and forgetting, for all that period of crisis and strain.<sup>5</sup> But uncrystallized ideas do not make a poem. Lowell himself said that the germ of a poem (the *idée-mère*) was always delightful but that he had no pleasure in working it up.<sup>6</sup> Even with two months to spend on his task it seems probable that he delayed translating his war-time passion and feelings into the verses of his *Ode* until the end of the period. An attack of the gout during late May certainly could not have increased his incentive to work. Furthermore, as president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard, he must have had very much on his mind the arrangements for the Society's annual meeting the day after Commencement. He had evidently accomplished so little that — with the great day looming upon him — he dejectedly told Child that he should expect nothing from him,<sup>7</sup> that he was dull as a door-mat.<sup>8</sup> All this does

<sup>4</sup> Horace Elisha Scudder. *James Russell Lowell A Biography*, Boston, 1901, II, p. 65, note.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Everett Hale. *James Russell Lowell and His Friends*, Boston, 1899, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to James B. Thayer in *Letters*, II, p. 8; quoted on page 176 *infra*.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to William James, in Scudder, *op. cit.*, II, p. 67, note.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to R. W. Gilder dated January 16, 1886, in *Letters*, II, p. 304.



not mean, however, that nothing had been done. Certainly by the time alumni had begun to pour into Cambridge for Commencement on July 19 Lowell had composed substantial portions of the *Ode*—so substantial that he could write: “Did I not for two days exasperate everybody that came near me by reciting passages in order to try them on?”<sup>9</sup>

These passages which Lowell was reciting to everybody could hardly have been composed during the two days immediately prior to the celebration. Certainly nothing was done on Commencement Day; we know that he was present at the church in the morning because Mrs. William Wetmore Story wrote to her daughter: “We met many an old friend there, and it went straight to my heart to see papa walking arm-in-arm with James Lowell.”<sup>10</sup> And of the afternoon Lowell himself wrote: “[Story] and two more came up hither after dinner [Commencement], and we talked and laughed and smoked and drank Domdechanei till there wasn’t a bald head nor a gray hair among us. — I forgot for a few blessed hours that I was a professor, and felt as if I were something real.” And continuing he writes: “But Phi Beta came next day, and *wasn’t* I tired! Presiding from 9 A.M. till 6½ P.M. is no joke,”—and so there could hardly have been any work on the *Ode* that day; but still continuing, he writes: “and then up next morning at ½ past 4 to copy out and finish my ode.”<sup>11</sup> And so it would seem that by Commencement Day on July 19th Lowell already had his *idée-mère*, already had sufficient passages and stanzas to try out on his friends, and only rose early on the morning of Commemoration Day to “copy out and finish” the ode.

This is the story as written four and five days after the event itself when the actual circumstances were entirely fresh in his memory, Lowell’s own statements made many years later to the

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Jane Norton, quoted on page 178 *infra*.

<sup>10</sup> Henry James. *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, Boston, 1903, p. 174.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Jane Norton, in *Letters*, I, p. 345.

contrary notwithstanding. One such statement was the following: "I sat up all the night before the ceremony, writing and copying out what I had written during the day. I think most of it was composed on that last day."<sup>12</sup> Another was: "The ode itself was an improvisation. Two days before the Commemoration I had told my friend Child that it was impossible — that I was dull as a door-mat. But the next day something gave me a jog and the whole thing came out of me with a rush. I sat up all night writing it out clear."<sup>13</sup> And still another was this: "The 'Commemoration Ode,' with the exception of the passage about Lincoln, was wholly composed in the two days before that on which it was to be delivered, mainly in the latter of the two. I sat up [changed to *spent*] all the last night in copying & finishing it. Till it thus came with a rush, I had given up all hope of being able to write anything for that truly sublime occasion, as my friend Professor Child, who asked it of me will remember."<sup>14</sup>

That final fair copy written during the early hours of Commemoration Day was at least written with a vehement speed which Lowell thought he had lost in the skirts of his professor's gown. That speed and the fact that he was "so rapt with the fervor of conception" as he had not been in ten years, losing sleep, appetite, and flesh, tended to make him so nervous that he was weeks in getting over it. "Virtue enough had gone out of me to make me weak for a fortnight after," he wrote.

Early the next morning, before the alumni had begun to arrive for their ten o'clock assembly at Gore Hall for the procession to the church, Lowell took Child aside in the Yard under an elm between Massachusetts and old Dane Halls (in the present Matthews quadrangle) to have him read parts of the *Ode*. "I

<sup>12</sup> Letter to William James, in Scudder, op. cit., II, p. 67, note.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to R. W. Gilder, as cited.

<sup>14</sup> This extract is taken from a manuscript in Lowell's hand now owned by Carroll A. Wilson entitled "Prefatory Note to the Poems," which was evidently written for the final edition of his poems. Only the first part (not here quoted) actually appeared in print, however.

have something, but don't yet know what it is, or whether it will do. Look at it and tell me." Child read a passage here and there, brought it back, and said, "Do? I should think so! Don't you be scared."<sup>15</sup> Lowell also recited it that morning to John Holmes and William Story, "both of 'em fervently declaring it was 'noble' " with tears in their eyes. He tried it out on "the silent Rowse" who declared " 'twas in a higher mood than much or most of later verse."<sup>16</sup>

The finished poem which Lowell showed to Child and his other friends that morning is a loose, irregular ode with unequal and unbalanced verses and broken stanzas in the form of the odes of Pindar with their strophes, antistrophes and epodes written to be chanted by a chorus—or rather in the form of the structureless Pindarics invented by Cowley and adopted by a long line of successors—Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and others.

About no other of his poems has Lowell written so fully in explanation of form and content as he has about this *Commemoration Ode*. In a long letter to James B. Thayer on January 14, 1877, he explained his reasons for adopting the form he used:

But what I wished to say a word to you about (since you are so generous in your judgment) is the measures I have chosen in these as well as the "Commemoration Ode." I am induced to this by reading in an article on Cowley copied into the *Living Age* from the *Cornhill* (and a very good article too, in the main) the following passage, "As lately as our own day" (*my* ear would require "So lately as," by the way) "Mr. Lowell's 'Commemoration Ode' is a specimen of the formless poem of unequal lines and broken stanzas supposed to be in the manner of Pindar, but truly the descendant of our royalist poet's 'majestick numbers.' " Now, whatever my other shortcomings (and they are plenty, as none knows better than I), want of reflection is not one of them. The poems were all intended for public recitation. That was the first thing to be considered. I suppose my ear (from long and painful practice on F.B.K. poems) has more technical experience in this than almost any. The least tedious measure is the rhymed heroic, but this, too, palls unless relieved by passages of wit or even mere fun. A long series of uniform stanzas (I am always speaking of public recitation) with regularly recurring rhymes produces somnolence among the men

<sup>15</sup> Letter to R. W. Gilder, as cited.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Jane Norton, quoted on page 178 *infra*.



and a desperate resort to their fans on the part of the women. No method has yet been invented by which the train of thought or feeling can be shunted off from the epical to the lyrical track. My ears have been jolted often enough over the sleepers on such occasions to know that. I know *something* (of course an American can't know much) about Pindar. But *his* odes had the advantage of being chanted. Now, my problem was to contrive a measure which should not be tedious by uniformity, which should vary with varying moods, in which the transitions (including those of the voice) should be managed without jar. I at first thought of mixed rhymed and blank verses of unequal measures, like those of the choruses of "Samson Agonistes," which are in the main masterly. Of course, Milton *deliberately* departed from that stricter form of the Greek Chorus to which it was bound quite as much (I suspect) by the law of its musical accompaniment as by any sense of symmetry. I wrote some stanzas of the "Commemoration Ode" on this theory at first, leaving some verses without a rhyme to match. But my ear was better pleased when the rhyme, coming at a longer interval, as a far-off echo rather than instant reverberation, produced the same effect almost, and yet was grateful by unexpectedly recalling an association and faint reminiscence of consonance. I think I have succeeded pretty well, and if you try reading aloud I believe you would agree with me. . . .

The *Cornhill* writer adds that "Keats, Shelley, and Swinburne, on the other hand, have restored to the ode its harmony and shapeliness." He and I have different notions of harmony. He evidently means uniformity of recurrence. It isn't true of Shelley, some of whose odes certainly were written on the Cowley model. All of Wordsworth's are, except the "Power of Sound" and the "Immortality," which is irregular, but whose cadences were learned of Gray. (— Gray's odes are regular.) Coleridge's are also Cowleian in form, I am pretty sure. But all these were written for the closet — and mine for recitation. I chose my measures with my ears open. So I did in writing the poems on Rob Shaw. That *is* regular because meant only to be read, and because also I thought it should have in the form of its stanza something of the formality of an epitaph.

Pardon me all this. But I could not help wishing to leave in friendly hands a protest against being thought a lazy rhymers who wrote in *numerus* that seem, but are not, *lege solutis*, because it was easier. It isn't easier, if it be done well, that is, if it attain to a real and not a merely visual harmony of verse. The mind should be rhymed to, as well as the ear and eye. *Mere* uniformity gives the columns and wings and things of Herbert and Quarles. If I had had more time to mull over my staves they would have been better.<sup>17</sup>

Previously on December 8, 1868, Lowell had also answered some doubts and queries which Thayer had raised in a review of the poem.<sup>18</sup> Lowell wrote:

<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> For this review see page 187 *infra*.

I have never meddled with any criticism of what I write, nor am I very sensitive about it, having long ago made up my mind that whatever was good would make its own way at last. But how could I be other than pleased with your "notice" of my book in the *Daily Advertiser*? It was sympathetic, and what more could one ask? . . .

I don't know how to answer your queries about my "Ode." I *guess* I am right, for it was a matter of pure instinct — except the strophe you quote, [the new one first appearing in *Under the Willows*] which I added for balance both of measure and thought. I am not sure if I understand what you say about the tenth strophe. You will observe that it leads naturally to the eleventh, and that I there justify a certain narrowness in it as an expression of the popular feeling as well as my own. I confess I have never got over the feeling of wrath with which (just after the death of my nephew Willie) I read in an English paper that nothing was to be hoped of an army officered by tailors' apprentices and butcher-boys. The poem was written with a vehement speed, which I thought I had lost in the skirts of my professor's gown. Till within two days of the celebration I was hopelessly dumb, and then it all came with a rush, literally making me lean (*mi fece magro*), and so nervous that I was weeks in getting over it. I was longer in getting the new (eleventh) [Lowell means the ninth] strophe to my mind than in writing the rest of the poem. In *that* I hardly changed a word, and it was so undeliberate that I did not find out until after it was printed that some of the verses lacked corresponding rhymes. All the "*War Poems*" were improvisations, as it were. My blood was up, and you would hardly believe me if I were to tell you few hours intervened between conception and completion, even in so long a one as "Mason and Slidell." So I have a kind of faith that the "Ode" is right because it was *there*, I hardly knew how. I doubt you are right in wishing it more historical. But then I could not have written it. I had put the ethical and political view so often in prose that I was weary of it. The motives of the war? I had impatiently argued them again and again — but for an ode they must be in the blood and not the memory. . . .

It bothers me sometimes in writing verses. The germ of a poem (the *idée-mère*) is always delightful to me, but I have no pleasure in working it up. I carry them in my head sometimes for years before they insist on being written. . . .<sup>19</sup>

The program for that Commemoration Day called for services in the Unitarian Church in the forenoon followed, after an intermission of an hour or two, by a dinner with speeches, music, poems, etc. in a great pavilion taking up the entire quadrangle between Holden Chapel, Hollis Hall, Harvard Hall and the street. It was at the very end of the afternoon near the close of

<sup>19</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 8.

the program that Charles G. Loring called upon Lowell to read his *Ode*. It was probably already after six o'clock when he was introduced and many had left the tent. He read from his seat under the huge Harvard coat-of-arms on the wall of Hollis near which he was sitting with his class of 1838.<sup>20</sup>

Although Edward Everett Hale who was present has written: "His own intense interest was evident enough, but it was reflected in what I might call the passionate interest with which people heard";<sup>21</sup> and although Abbot Lawrence Lowell has said: "His delivery, usually cold, was impassioned, and the people in the broad tent spread near the college grounds were profoundly moved,"<sup>22</sup> general evidence indicates that to most listeners that afternoon the *Ode* was not a great success even though actually written to be declaimed. Both the *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune* failed to mention it — possibly their reporters were among those who had left. The best that the *New York Times* representative could say was: "The poet, James Russell Lowell, was next introduced, and received with great applause. He proceeded to read a beautiful poem, of which it is the highest praise to say it was worthy of its distinguished author. I regret not being able to send you a copy." *The Daily Evening Traveller* of Boston merely said: "Prof. Jas. Russell Lowell read an eloquent poem." But it was the words of the *Boston Daily Advertiser* which really seared the soul of Lowell: "Professor James Russell Lowell was

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to me dated December 2, 1939, Mrs. Elizabeth D. Worcester, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Hill, President of Harvard at the time of the Commemoration, has written: "I am especially interested in that Ode as I imagine I am one of the very few now living who heard it when given. I say 'heard it,' but it was not with any understanding of what was being said. A kind policeman lifted up a flap of the huge tent where the exercises were going on, & let my little sister & me crawl in under it. I remember as though it were yesterday looking across that great sea of heads & seeing Mr. Lowell standing there, & hearing his voice."

For an interesting psychic manifestation of the delivery of the Ode, too long to be quoted here, see two letters written to William James by Charles P. Ware and Lowell, first published in the *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research* for March, 1889, Vol. I, p. 373, and subsequently reprinted in great part in Scudder, op. cit., II, p. 67, note.

<sup>21</sup> *James Russell Lowell and His Friends*, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> Massachusetts Historical Society. *Proceedings*, 2nd Series, XI, p. 91.

next introduced, and read a graceful poem, which was received with the most decided demonstrations of satisfaction."

It is no wonder that the sensitive Lowell with wistful dejection should have poured out his heart to Jane Norton in a letter four days later:

. . . I am here among my books and I am in a literal sense alive. I eat and smoke and sleep and go through all the nobler functions of man mechanically still, and wonder at myself as at something outside of and alien to Me. For have I not worked myself lean on an "Ode for Commemoration"? Was I not so rapt with the fervor of conception as I have not been these ten years, losing my sleep, my appetite, and my flesh, those attributes to which I before alluded as nobly uniting us in a common nature with our kind? Did I not for two days exasperate everybody that came near me by reciting passages in order to try them on? Did I not even fall backward and downward to the old folly of hopeful youth, and think I had written something *really* good at last? And am I not now enduring those retributive dumps which ever follow such sinful exultations, the Erynnyes of Vanity? Did not I make John Holmes and William Story shed tears by my recitation of it (my ode) in the morning, both of 'em fervently declaring it was "noble"? Did not even the silent Rowse declare 'twas in a higher mood than much or most of later verse? Did not I think, in my nervous exhilaration, that 'twould be *the* feature (as reporters call it) of the day? And, after all, have I not a line in the *Daily Advertiser* calling it a "graceful poem" (or "some graceful verses," I forget which), which was "received with applause"? Why, Jane, my legs are those of grasshoppers, and my head is an autumn threshing-floor, still beating with alternate flails of strophe and antistrophe, and an infinite virtue has gone out of me somehow — but it seems *not* into my verse as I had dreamed. Well, well, Charles will like it — but then he always does, so what's the use? I am Icarus now with the cold salt sea over him instead of the warm exulting blue of ether. I am gone under, and I will never be a fool again. You read between the lines, don't you, . . . You know my foibles . . . Like a boy, I mistook my excitement for inspiration, and here I am in the mud. You see also I am a little disappointed and a little few (*un petit peu*) vexed. I did *not* make the hit I expected, and am ashamed at having been again tempted into thinking I could write *poetry*, a delusion from which I have been tolerably free these dozen years. . . .

And continuing the next day he wrote:

I have not got cool yet (I mean as to nerves), and lie awake at night thinking how much better my verses might have been, only I can't make 'em so. Well, I am



printing fifty copies in 4to, and Charles will like it, as I said before, and I sha'n't, because I thought too well of it at first.<sup>23</sup>

It is only fair to say that it was not unusual for Lowell to climb to the heights of emotional exhilaration in the composition of a poem only later to fall far down into the depths of despair — he often tasted his champagne the next morning, as he has said.

There were some, however, who even on that day sensed the true significance of the *Ode*, so that Lowell's melancholy pessimism was not entirely justified even then. Mrs. James T. Fields wrote in her diary the following day: "What an ever-memorable day, the one at Harvard! The prayer of Phillips Brooks, the ode of Lowell, the address of Dr. Putnam and the Governor, and the heartfelt verses of Holmes, and the lovely music and the hymns. But Lowell's Ode!! How it overtops the whole of what is preserved on paper beside!"<sup>24</sup> In a letter to her daughter three days after the celebration Mrs. Story wrote: "There too James Lowell read a very fine poem, full of spirit and pathos."<sup>25</sup> John S. Dwight speaks of the fine events of the day, "especially a very noble poem by James Russell Lowell."<sup>26</sup>

But in spite of all expressions of appreciation and admiration it seems evident that the *Ode* was not the feature of the day — not the great peroration of the celebration. Scudder well explains the reason:

The Ode did not at once assert its high character, yet it must be borne in mind that the very reason of its form acted somewhat against its immediate popularity. It is truly an ode to be recited, and as a chorus depends for its power upon a volume of sound, so this ode needs, to bring out its full value, a great delivery. Lowell himself, always a sympathetic reader, had no such power of recitation as would at once convey to his audience a notion of the stateliness and procession of words which attaches to the ode. — Lowell's explanation of the form of the ode

<sup>23</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library, printed in great part in *Letters*, I, p. 345.

<sup>24</sup> M. A. DeWolfe Howe, editor. *Memories of a Hostess A Chronicle of Eminent Friendships drawn chiefly from the Diaries of Mrs. James T. Fields*, Boston, 1922, p. 36, note.

<sup>25</sup> *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, August 5, 1865.

is significant. So native to him was the most genuine literary spirit that he could conceive of the ode and its delivery as one consistent whole without being perturbed by the consideration that he was to deliver it and to a modern audience trained in the reading of poetry, not in the hearing of it. Both the poetic reciter and the recipients were wanting, and the ode remains, a noble piece of declamation indeed for whoever has the great gift of poetic declamation, yet after all as surely to be read and not spoken as Browning's dramas are to be read and not acted.<sup>27</sup>

Although Lowell made plans immediately after the celebration (or probably before) to print fifty copies of the *Ode*, it first appeared in print in *The Atlantic Monthly* for September, 1865, with the title, *Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865*, but with no indication of the author in the table of contents or elsewhere, as was usual for that magazine at that time. On August 25, 1865, this number of the *Atlantic* was first advertised as being ready. Over a week later on September 3rd Lowell sat down and wrote presentation inscriptions in the fifty copies of that privately printed edition with the title-page: *Ode | Recited at the | Commemoration [in red] | of | The Living and Dead Soldiers | of Harvard University, | July 21, 1865. | By James Russell Lowell. | (Harvard Arms) | Cambridge: [in red] | Privately Printed. | 1865. |*

If the reception of the *Ode* at the Commemoration celebration had been lukewarm, there is no question but that its real greatness was immediately appreciated when it had once been seen in print with its powerful additional stanza on Lincoln. Referring again to Mrs. Fields's diary the following entry is found under date of September 6: "Mr. Emerson went to see Mr. Fields. 'There are fine lines in Lowell's Ode,' he said. 'Yes,' answered J. T. F., 'it is a fine poem.' 'I have found fine lines in it,' replied the seer. 'I told Lowell once,' he continued, 'that his humorous poems gave me great pleasure; they were worth all his serious poetry. He did not take it very well, but muttered, "The Washers of the Shroud," and walked away.'"<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Scudder, op. cit., II, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Memories of a Hostess*, p. 90.

Emerson wrote directly to Lowell as follows on September 17th:

I send you warm thanks, if late, for the admirable Ode. I shall always be sorry that I did not hear it. The eighth strophe, with its passion & its vision, was made to be spoken. The technical skill shown throughout is masterly, & yet subordinated by the high thought & sentiment of the piece, which make me glad & proud of it as a national poem. When you shall collect your recent poems in a book, I hope you will drop from this the one or two needless reminders of Tennyson, & I shall affirm with joy, against any possible previous speeches of my own to you, that your eminent success with the comic muse has in no wise hindered you from the command of all the resources of the noble & serious goddess.<sup>29</sup>

George W. Curtis sent his encomiums in a letter dated September 12:

I thank you with all my heart for the noble ode which with all my heart I have read & enjoyed. Certainly you have done nothing in a loftier strain. — nor has anything more truly worthy of the great theme been written. If it is very serious and very sad it is for the same reason that the sky is blue and the corn yellow. I have read it aloud to Anna, and read it and re-read it to myself: and I am sure it says what the truest American heart feels and believes. And if that is not a worth while doing — if a man *can* do it — what is? . . .<sup>30</sup>

Four days later Sydney Howard Gay added his compliments:

Let me thank you most patriotically for your noble poem which has y<sup>e</sup> old & true ring in it of y<sup>e</sup> weapons which I had almost begun to fear you had forgotten how to use; & most sincerely & tenderly that you count me among your fifty friends. It is a beautiful book, worthy its contents, worthy its two dedications — especially worthy y<sup>e</sup> names of those noble young sons of our good old mother state who were fit to die for her, & whose memory you thus help to keep green forever. . . .<sup>31</sup>

On September 21st both James Freeman Clarke and Richard Grant White wrote letters of praise; the former said:

I was so unfortunate as to leave the tent, on Commemoration Day, before you read your Ode. It is only two or three days since I read it in the Atlantic. I find it impossible to deny myself the pleasure of saying to you how deeply it has

<sup>29</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library, printed in *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* edited by Ralph L. Rusk, New York, 1939, V, p. 425.

<sup>30</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library.

<sup>31</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library.

thrilled me, & how I rejoice that this grand, tender, noble song, has been inspired for this great hour of the Nation. It was hardly to be hoped that anything at all adequate could be said or sung. But if I can at all trust a profound sentiment, your poem is to be as immortal as the time whose grandeur of tone it takes, whose flaming light illumines it. There has been as little said about the Poem as about the Peace. The Peace came upon us with victory, and we scarcely knew when. So greatest events arrive — so come birth, death, sunrise, summer; with no abrupt transition, & no sound of trumpets or moving gun. — Your Poem seems to have arrived in the same way — no one saying “Lo here! or Lo there!” — I have read it twice, aloud, to my family — & its solemn sweetness has penetrated all our hearts.<sup>32</sup>

And the latter wrote:

Thanks for the copy of the privately printed edition of your Commemoration Ode. To be remembered by you among fifty is very gratifying to me who have so little claim upon your regard other than the high value that I set upon it. I had not seen the ode before, & I read it last evening. It lasted two pipes very pleasant ones. I'm not going to pay you in praise for your beautiful book (which, by the way, has such a distinguished look in the real old-fashioned boards) — because I would not presume to offer that kind of chaff to you, O High-worthy Mister. But I wont be prevented from saying that I take mightily to your epithet “sure-footed” for Lincoln's mind — that the passage “Be proud for she is saved” stirred me deeply — & that perhaps most of all I was pleased with the line in which you say that certain relaxing lips “The rosy edges of their smile lay bare.”

I have very grave doubts about “innative weakness.” Surely *in* is not negative? But if not, what is “innative” more than “native”?<sup>33</sup>

Edward Everett Hale had this to say:

I was out of town when the beautiful copy of your Ode arrived, or I should have thanked you for it earlier. Of course I had read the Ode with great pleasure already — I am delighted to keep it in this sumptuous form for my children to grow up to —

There are passages in it that the boys of generation upon generation will speak at school — and that will be remembered and repeated when people do not know whether Bull Run was a victory or a defeat —

Does it ever occur to you that in this generation men do not know whether Marston Moor or Naseby were decided on the right or wrong side? Yet ninety years ago “Cromwell's head” was a tavern sign in School Street.

<sup>32</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library.

<sup>33</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library.



Thanking you heartily for remembering me in your distribution I am always Yrs.<sup>34</sup>

John Weiss on October 11th made particular note of the significance of the *Ode*:

The early copy of the Commemoration Ode which you were so kind as to send me, came on the eve of our flitting to another house. Now for the first time I find a pen to thank you. This, and your "76," and Bryant's "Not Yet," remain the permanent contributions of poetic fire to the Country whose literature has been stirred by war. It tempts me to write its merits, delicate and lofty, that perchance it may become better regarded and duly honored. Because anybody can stop and cry "Look." Then if there is something to see, the crowd is glad.

But I fancy you would prefer to crave from Milton the loan of those ears which listened earliest and keenest to his "Lycidas," or to win half of Shakespeare's secret by gaining such as heard his sonnets first.

In the meantime, there is in it for me not a line too much, nor one below the sacrifice that is commemorated. And what a delight it is to admire it.<sup>35</sup>

On September 10th Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar also wrote:

Many thanks for your beautiful book, which the mail brought punctually to hand, and which "No. 7" of your friends received with pride and pleasure.

I cannot compare the poem with all that has made you famous, because it has no relation to such things as "Bigelow Papers" "Fable for Critics," and so on. But it has affected me more, in hearing and reading, than anything of yours of the serious kind; and I think its tone lofty and noble, and the execution worthy of the theme.

What an occasion that Commemoration was! Why! It was the whole war concentrated, and you have embalmed its essence and its flavor forever. . . .

I still think the best line in the poem is

That is best blood which hath most iron in't,

but there are whole strophes that I have read over many times with delight, and should be glad to hear you read again. . . .<sup>36</sup>

On March 26, 1867, Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote to Lowell in these words:

<sup>34</sup> Original letter dated October 4, 1865, owned by Hon. Hanford McNider, Mason City, Iowa.

<sup>35</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library.

<sup>36</sup> Letter printed in *Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar A Memoir* by Moorfield Storey and Edward W. Emerson, Boston, 1911, p. 155.

In the new edition of the Harvard Biographies, your great poem will of course reappear. It is in my poor Judgment not merely your chef d'oeuvre — helping to reconcile your friends to your long silences, — but also the first of American poems, thus far. This shows with what modesty I must criticize even what seems to me its sole weak point, however small — the word “and” in the 5th stanza line 13. I cannot disengage it from the word “ere” with which it has, in meaning, no connexion. Surely, when the cannon’s lips are lightest, the sword has ceased to dream. To my ear *and* should read *while*, & even that does not disentangle the sentence without a dash (—) before it, to detach it in time from the clause just preceding. Or if it were

“and the sword  
Leaps from its easeful sheath;”

then the two dependent clauses would correspond. Now that I have written this, it seems like an impertinence, but I may as well let it go. . . .<sup>37</sup>

Subsequent reviewers and commentators have written much about the *Commemoration Ode*. Henry James uses these words:

A wealth of eloquence and cheer had attended the Harvard celebration of the return of Peace, — but the climax had been Lowell’s delivery of his noble Commemoration Ode, as to which one now sees — as to which one even then perhaps mutely, mystically made out — that a great thing that was to live had been but half-notedly born.<sup>38</sup>

Scudder says that in no other single poem except Whitman’s *My Captain* does the young American born since the war have his emotions so kindled. The characterization of Lincoln — probably more often read and quoted than any other parts of the *Ode* — is so completely imbedded in it and so spontaneous that it gives no sense of being an afterthought. “Into these three score lines Lowell has poured a conception of Lincoln which may justly be said to be today the accepted idea which Americans hold of their great president.” Lowell was the first of the leading American writers to see and proclaim the greatness of Lincoln. This recognition was a matter of development on Lowell’s part; he never saw Lincoln.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Original letter in Harvard College Library; Lowell’s answer is found in *Letters*, I, p. 379; and is also quoted on pages 192, 196, 197 and 199 infra.

<sup>38</sup> *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, p. 176.

<sup>39</sup> Scudder, op. cit., II, p. 68.

Apropos of this particular stanza Lowell himself wrote:

The passage about Lincoln was not in the ode as originally recited, but added immediately after. More than eighteen months before, however, I had written about Lincoln in the *North American Review* — an article which pleased him. I *did* divine him earlier than most men of the Brahmin caste.<sup>40</sup>

In 1885 Edmund Clarence Stedman wrote a detailed and appreciative criticism of the *Ode* and its nobility of feeling, in the course of which he calls it “no smooth-cut block from Pentelicus, but a mass of rugged quartz, beautified with prismatic crystals, and deep-veined here and there with virgin gold.”<sup>41</sup>

Ferris Greenslet likewise has written a pertinent analysis of the work. He says that on this the greatest occasion of his life, Lowell gave expression to what is one of the great occasional poems of the world.<sup>42</sup>

At a much later day on November 15, 1918, we find Henry Lee Higginson writing to Sir Hugh Levick:

On Monday morning at five o'clock, — that is before light, — the whistles began to blow and the bells to ring, and they did not stop for twenty-four hours. . . . the relief and joy were very great. . . . Comments are unnecessary. Two or three lines keep coming to me. One of them is Mr. Lowell's ode when the Harvard men came home from the Civil War. One stanza begins: “Bow down, dear land, for thou hast found release,” and it is so strong that I never repeat it without my voice breaking. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Only the year before at the 1917 Commencement exercises at Harvard, Higginson had ended his short and strong appeal for help in the struggle, with the last five lines of the *Ode*, so moved that he could not utter another word.<sup>44</sup>

And finally as recently as the year 1940 President Shuster of Hunter College had this to say:

<sup>40</sup>Letter to R. W. Gilder, as cited.

<sup>41</sup>Edmund Clarence Stedman. *Poets of America*, Cambridge, 1885, II, p. 343.

<sup>42</sup>Ferris Greenslet. *James Russell Lowell His Life and Work*, Boston, 1905, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup>Bliss Perry. *Life and Letters of Henry Lee Higginson*, Boston, 1921, p. 518.

<sup>44</sup>Edward W. Emerson. *The Early Years of the Saturday Club*, Boston, 1918, p. 401, note.

The great American panegyric ode is Lowell's "Commemoration Ode," read on July 21, 1865. Granted that it is uneven and wearying long, the best passages are very good, indeed. The sixth stanza, which begins,

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,  
Whom late the Nation he had led,  
With ashes on her head,  
Wept with the passion of an angry grief;

is as illustrious a hymn of praise as our verse affords. These chaste, forthright, heartfelt sentences established a myth to which generations of Americans have turned almost unquestioningly; and though the sign under which they were born was rhetoric rather than metrical music, it is no meager praise to say that in them image, terse statement, and genial warmth of rhythm were combined.<sup>45</sup>

In a review in 1869 of *Under the Willows and Other Poems* in which the *Ode* was first collected, William Dean Howells says that of itself this ode could make us believe that the war had produced a literature. After quoting the third stanza he writes:

One shudders at the thought of certain poor old combinations of adjectives, well enough for common use, being made to stand for an appreciation of this poem. There is something like warning in its superb completeness; compliment is not for the reverence which unseals the poet's lips in self-doubt, nor the triumph which closes them upon those words of tender and sublime exultance,—

"Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!"

There is reason given for all the faith and love in the poem; there is no appeal to mere emotion, nor the noisiness of transport, whatever fervor; its most exalted feeling is in an impassioned study; what is likeliest rapture is the thrill of uttering divine fact; yet with all its severe and predominant intellectual qualities,—and let us remember that he who said poetry should be "simple, sensuous, passionate," left making such poetry to his inferiors,—it is richer than any other poem of its kind in the delights of art, in form, in music, in grace of movement, in vivid and heroic pictures.<sup>46</sup>

In another review of the same book James B. Thayer said that the two crowning pieces of the volume were the *Ode* and *Memoriae Positum*:

<sup>45</sup> George N. Shuster. *The English Ode from Milton to Keats*, New York, 1940, p. 281, note.

<sup>46</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1869, XXIII, p. 262.



As to the "Commemoration Ode," no one who heard it when it was first recited will easily forget either the poem or the reading of it. Surely there are none of our war poems to compare with this one, unless it be the author's own. As it is now printed, a whole new section, the ninth, has been added to the version heretofore published.

He then proceeds to quote the greater part of this new "thoughtful, strong, imaginative strain," and asks where in contemporary poetry, unless in Emerson's "Threnody," shall one go for such passages; and he asks what there is to compare with the superb and passionate ending of the ode, which he also quotes.

It is but a poor business when so great a gift as this is before us, to find fault with it or to ask whether it might not have been better. Two or three things one might say, but we are hardly clear enough in our impression to suggest them.—Does not the poet in some places celebrate over-much and with too ingenious a fancy the littleness of mankind and certain painful questionings that afflict them?—Might not the tenth section well enough have been dropped?—And was not something to have been gained in such a poem, by calling up with more distinctness certain great characteristics of the war? <sup>47</sup>

In 1869 the Rev. W. C. Wilkinson wrote an excellent review of Lowell's poetry—detailed and didactic.<sup>48</sup> Much concerns the *Commemoration Ode*. He notes that in repeated perusals of almost any one of Mr. Lowell's poems they never seem less beautiful than they did at first, but they seldom seem more beautiful. He calls this ode a notable exception to this remark, however, being the most elevated in aspiration of all his poems and ranking in the peerage of the very few greatest odes in the English language. He regards the Lincoln strophe as "the Kohinoor, to which all that precedes and all that follows is magnificent setting. There are almost no blemishes in the perfection of this noble passage." Although its source is rather inaccessible, the whole review is too long to print here, but the praise given to the poem as a whole is so tempered by wise and relevant criticism that it is evi-

<sup>47</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Supplement, Saturday morning, December 5, 1868. See page 176 *infra* for Lowell's letter in reply to this review.

<sup>48</sup> Mr. Lowell's Poetry, in *The Baptist Quarterly*, October, 1869, III, pp. 436-463.

dent the author had a much clearer perception of Lowell's strength and weakness—in this poem as in all his work—than most of his better-known contemporaries and successors.

Two English reviews of *Under the Willows* have comments about the *Ode* which are also interesting and to the point. As in the case of the preceding reviewer the authors certainly could not be accused of being members of Boston's mutual admiration society.

The unknown writer in the *Athenaeum* for April 17, 1869, is especially eulogistic about the *Poems of the War* in which group the *Commemoration Ode* is found: "They go to the heart like a strain of grand music, or like that most thrilling of all human sounds, the voice of a multitude raised in song." He calls the *Ode* a noble poem, and in quoting the last stanza and a half, speaks of it as a noble picture of America sitting down in peace, and of the position she will take in the new order that is arising out of the old.

America has often "vaunted herself" and been vulgarized by the bragging and boasting of her own people. She has not been made to look lovely in the eyes of men who were not her sons; but Mr. Lowell invests America with an ideal grace which gives her beauty we did not own before.

The reviewer in *The Spectator* for February 6, 1869, calling Lowell the only really original poet America had yet produced, spends about half his article (reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* for March 13, 1869) comparing Lowell and Wordsworth. He picks out for quotation the sixth stanza about Lincoln as the most original and finest thing the volume contained and writes:

That most childlike and most sagacious of modern rulers is painted in colours that will, we may safely assert, last as long as the history of that great struggle, and be resorted to—till the American people ceases to brood over its own greatest deeds—as the one *locus classicus* to generation after generation for a portrait of the greatest, simplest, and most characteristic figure of the conflict—

a portrait which he calls finer as well as more individual than Wordsworth's *Happy Warrior* itself. He says that this portrait

makes us feel the touch of the genuine poet, who, the deeper may be his insight into human nature at large, will only feel the more enthusiasm for those national and local virtues into which it has been his inheritance to gain a still fuller insight.

Still later another Englishman, "F. T.," in a fine critical study of Lowell and his writings entitled *Mr. Lowell's Poems* in *The Cornhill Magazine* for January, 1875, wrote:

... But in the "Commemoration Ode," he has found an appropriate occasion and form for pouring out his strongest feelings in masculine verse. One or two stanzas even here may be a little too didactic; and the style is rather broad and manly than marked by the exquisite felicities which betray the hand of a perfect master. But throughout the ode the stream of song flows at once strong and deep. The poet is speaking from his heart, and with a solemnity, a pathos, and elevation of feeling worthy of a great event. Few official copies of verses, composed by invitation on set occasions, escape the condemnation of coldness and formality. Little would be lost to our literature if all the verses written by laureates, as laureates, were summarily burnt. But for once we feel that we are listening to a man whose whole heart, pent up by years of disappointment and suspense, has at last launched itself into a song of triumph. There is no unworthy element of petty spite or unworthy complacency to jar upon us. Whatever may be our political sympathies, we must be indifferent, not to the cause of the North, but to the cause of humanity, not to be carried away by the energy of the poetic declamation. The triumph is not offensive because it is free from meanness; and the patriotism implies a generous rejoicing that the oppressed have been freed from bondage and the poor lifted out of the dust.

He calls the *Ode* the one poetical product of the Civil War which will deserve to live by the side of the last inaugural message of the murdered President whom it eulogizes with such singular felicity.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> In addition to the various observations regarding the *Commemoration Ode* which have been quoted herein, the following sources of critical comments may also be mentioned: *James Russell Lowell An Address* by George William Curtis, New York, 1893, p. 23; original letter in Harvard College Library from Thomas Wentworth Higginson to Lowell dated September 14, 1865, acknowledging receipt of a copy of the private edition; *The Early Years of the Saturday Club* by Edward W. Emerson, Boston, 1918, p. 400; Charles Eliot Norton in *Letters*, I, p. 267; a review of *Under the Willows and Other Poems* by J. R. Dennett in *The Nation*, December 31, 1868, VII, p. 554; *The Architecture of American Colleges (I. Harvard)* by Montgomery Schuyler in *The Architectural Record*, October, 1909, XXVI, p. 268.

With the passage of time the early pessimism of Lowell himself gave way to a more satisfied feeling regarding his work. In a letter to Norton from London on August 17, 1880, he wrote:

By the way, I spent Sunday with Mr. Leveson Gower (Lord Granville's brother and a charming host), and coming in from out of doors came upon John Bright reading aloud from the "Commemoration Ode." It sounded better than I feared — but when I am asked to read I never can find anything that seems to me good enough.<sup>50</sup>

And again in writing to Richard Watson Gilder some years later (on January 16, 1886) he said:

I was amazed at the praises I got. Trevelyan told me afterwards that he never could have carried through the abolition of purchase in the British Army but for the reinforcement he got from that poem.<sup>51</sup>

As one reads the *Commemoration Ode* now many years after that great Commemoration Day, even in the midst of the new conceptions of a new age, one can still appreciate why these early commentators and their successors through the decades could call it Lowell's greatest poem — certainly Harvard's greatest poem — the greatest poem of the Civil War — even America's greatest poem — one of the great occasional poems of the world. It could have been written only by one with the intense patriotism of Lowell — only by one who could write such a letter as he wrote to Norton on April 13, 1865, upon the advent of peace:

The news, my dear Charles, is from Heaven. I felt a strange and tender exultation. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry, and ended by holding my peace and feeling devoutly thankful. There is something magnificent in having a country to love. It is almost like what one feels for a woman. Not so tender, perhaps, but to the full as self-forgetful.<sup>52</sup>

It could have been written only by one who not only had suffered with that white-heat patriotism through the long years of the war, but also had been bowed by the personal loss such as had

<sup>50</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 251.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Gilder, as cited.

<sup>52</sup> *Letters*, I, p. 344.



come to Lowell so tragically in the death of relatives and friends.<sup>53</sup> It could have been written only by a true lover of humanity. Perhaps Lowell alone at that time and on that occasion could have risen to such heights; and Lowell himself had not done it before and never could do it again.

Although the *Ode* actually appeared in the *Atlantic* before Lowell's private edition was sent out, its earliest form is found in the latter book. There are innumerable differences between the two versions, practically all of which are of punctuation only; and as to such differences it is the *Atlantic* version which has been carried forward to subsequent issues. The original manuscript probably went to the printer immediately after the celebration — or at least as soon as the new sixth stanza on Lincoln had been written. When the book was well along toward completion and further type corrections were no longer possible, Lowell probably sent a printed proof to the *Atlantic* containing these numerous additional corrections. It is probable that Lowell had planned that his own edition would be the first to appear but that some delay held it up until the *Atlantic* had been published. One change made in the *Atlantic* and subsequently seems unfortunate; this is the title. The rolling, sonorous title used by Lowell for his own edition far better suits the *Ode* than the shorter form later adopted.

Following these two appearances the *Ode* is next found in the first edition of the *Harvard Memorial Biographies*, published in 1866 in two royal octavo volumes by Sever and Francis, where it appears as a prelude to the biographies with this caption: *Ode*

<sup>53</sup> The lives of these eight relatives are really an essential part of any story of the *Commemoration Ode*, because it was their deaths which made Lowell rise to the heights of poetic emotion in the poem. The loss of his three nephews in particular sorely affected him for many years afterward. This is seen not only in the eighth stanza of the *Ode* itself but in much of his other writing: the opening lines of the last stanza of *Memoriae Positum* written in August, 1863; three stanzas in the tenth of the second series of *Biglow Papers*; the story of the snowball battle in *A Good Word for Winter* written in 1871; and a letter written July 6, 1875, regarding the hand of reconciliation he had held out to Virginia in *Under the Old Elm* (*Letters*, II, p. 141.)

*Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865. By James Russell Lowell.* This work was edited by Thomas Wentworth Higginson under the superintendence of a committee appointed by the Harvard Alumni Association at its meeting the preceding Commencement. A prospectus was issued October 9, 1865. There are comparatively few differences between the two versions of the *Ode* as found in the *Atlantic* and in this work.

As already noted Higginson wrote to Lowell on March 26, 1867, that in the new edition of the *Harvard Biographies*, the great poem would of course reappear; he went on to make some suggestions for a change in one of the lines. Lowell replied two days later making the change suggested and adding two other more substantial ones and then wrote:

If your new edition is to be printed here, will you order proofs sent me? I wish it could be said somewhere that the "Ode" is reprinted "by request," or something of the kind. I told Child so before, but he said no. It strikes me in the same way now. It looks as if I had thrust it in there, a thought that makes me red. Why not at the head of it, after the title — "(reprinted by permission)"? I don't wish to give it too much importance, but it worries me.<sup>54</sup>

This second edition duly appeared in 1867 in two crown octavo volumes with the *Ode* again immediately preceding the biographies with the caption-title: *Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865. By James Russell Lowell.* [Reprinted by permission.]

The *Commemoration Ode* was first collected by Lowell in *Under the Willows and Other Poems* published by Fields, Osgood, & Co. in 1869 and first appearing about November 20, 1868. Its version therein carried further revisions, the most important of which was the addition of an entirely new stanza — the ninth. With this appearance the *Ode* took its final form with the exception of a very few minor differences. It is thereafter found in the various collected editions as they appeared. The differences in the various versions are all noted in Appendix I.

Of all the versions of the *Ode* and of all the books in which

<sup>54</sup> *Letters*, I, p. 379.

it appeared the privately printed edition issued by Lowell is by far the most interesting. Not only does it contain the *Ode* in its earliest known form—with words and verses most nearly approaching what Lowell actually read on that July Commemoration Day,—but it is in addition a beautiful specimen of book-making for the middle of the nineteenth century. The complete collation of the volume, the title-page of which has already been given, is as follows: Pages [2], [1]-25, [1]; four signatures, the first of two the others of four leaves as follows: one blank leaf; p. [1], title-page; p. [2], limitation line [“Fifty copies printed. | No. .”] and imprint [University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., | Cambridge.]; p. [3], “Note. | A few passages which would have made the Poem too long in the read- | ing are added in this printed copy.”; p. [4], blank; p. [5], general dedication [“To | the ever sweet and shining memory | of the | Ninety-three Sons of Harvard College | who have died for their country | in the war of nationality, | This Poem | is Dedicated.”]; p. [6], blank; p. [7], special dedication [“This edition of my Commemoration Ode, printed for friends, is inscribed | to those of my own kin who have fallen, not as singling them out for selfish | praise, but because they were chiefly in my heart as I wrote. | William Lowell Putnam. James Jackson Lowell. | Charles Russell Lowell. | Warren Dutton Russell. Francis Dutton Russell. | Stephen George Perkins. | Robert Gould Shaw. Cabot Russel.”(*sic*)]; p. [8], quotations:

“Who if he be called upon to face  
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined  
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,  
Is happy as a lover, and attired  
With sudden brightness as a man inspired.”  
Wordsworth.

“Ἡμεῖς δὲ μέγαλοιο Διὸς πειθόμεθα βουλῇ.  
Εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος, ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης.”<sup>55</sup>

Homer, *Iliad*, XII, 241, 243.

<sup>55</sup> “Let it be for us to yield obedience to great Zeus’s decree. There is one omen, best of all, to war for one’s own land.”

pp. [9]-25, text of ode; final blank page. Bound in grey boards with paper label on front cover reading "Commemoration | Ode." within a single-rule frame, turquoise green end papers, a single pasted-in fly-leaf front and back, trimmed, with top edges gilt; size  $9\frac{5}{8}$  x  $6\frac{7}{8}$  inches.

Fifty copies of this private edition were printed for friends. In an appendix to this article is found a list of as many of these recipients as it has been possible to locate. It would be interesting if the remainder could be determined. Copies must have gone to the Putnam, Lowell, Russell, Perkins, Shaw and Russel families; it has been said that each member of the Saturday Club was presented with a copy, but if so it has been impossible to learn anything of those that went to Louis Agassiz, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., John S. Dwight, John Lothrop Motley, Samuel G. Ward, Horatio Woodman, John Greenleaf Whittier, Thomas G. Appleton, John M. Forbes, James E. Cabot, Samuel G. Howe, Charles Sumner, Henry James, John A. Andrew, Martin Brimmer, James T. Fields and Samuel W. Rowse; it seems obvious that some of these at least would have received them. One would assume that Edmund Quincy, William Wetmore Story, William Page, W. J. Stillman and similar close friends had been remembered. President Thomas Hill, Professor Child, Professor E. W. Gurney, Professor George M. Lane and other college associates should have received copies. Perhaps E. L. Godkin and W. L. Garrison should be on the list. It should be noted that the names of thirty recipients have been located; the possible recipients listed above number thirty-three so that at least thirteen could not have been included.

Such is the factual story of Harvard's proudest poetic achievement — its monument to the devotion of those sons who answered the call in that Civil War crisis — a monument which will be more enduring than the bricks of Memorial Hall, — and a monument which is "still beaconing from the heights of undegenerate years" in the ordeal of 1943.



## Appendix I

## Variations in the Different Printings of the Commemoration Ode

(Based on the version in the Standard Library edition  
of Lowell's collected works.)

The title used by Lowell for the Private Edition was: *Ode Recited at the Commemoration of The Living and Dead Soldiers of Harvard University*, July 21, 1865. Elsewhere it was: *Ode recited at the Harvard Commemoration*, July 21, 1865.

The alignment of the lines throughout the *Ode* varies to some extent in the several versions.

There are approximately forty instances where the punctuation as first used in the Private Edition was subsequently changed. Such differences are not indicated below; nor are several other cases involving punctuation changes only.

## Stanza II.

Line 1: In the Private Edition and both editions of the *Memorial Biographies* the reading is . . . *welcomes home* instead of . . . *welcomes back*.

## Stanza IV.

Lines 23-25: These three lines —

*But stay! no age was e'er degenerate,  
Unless men held it at too cheap a rate,  
For in our likeness still we shape our fate.*

did not appear in the *Atlantic* nor the Private Edition; in both editions of the *Memorial Biographies* the last line reads: *For in our image still is shaped our fate*:. The three lines as they appear in the *Memorial Biographies* were inserted in Lowell's own hand in the copy of the Private Edition which he presented to Charles Eliot Norton.

Line 32: Prior to final collected edition *doth leaven* is used instead of *can leaven*.

Line 33: The final collected edition as well as the Private Edition reads *Our earthy dulness*; elsewhere *earthly* is used.

Line 42: Prior to the final collected edition *glimmering* is used instead of *beaconing*.

## Stanza V.

Line 13: In the Private Edition, *Atlantic* and first edition of the *Memorial Biographies* the line reads *Lights the black lips of cannon, and the sword*; in *Under the Willows* and the final edition the first word is *Light*; in the second

edition of the *Memorial Biographies* the line reads *Reddens the cannon's lips, and while the sword.*

To Thomas Wentworth Higginson's letter of March 26, 1867, in criticism of this line (see page 184 *infra*) Lowell replied on March 28 (see *Letters*, I, p. 379) as follows: "Your criticism is perfectly just, and I am much obliged to you for it — though I might defend myself, I believe, by some constructions even looser in some of the Greek choruses. But, on the whole, where I have my choice I prefer to make sense. . . . There is a horrible truth in the *litera scripta manet*, and the confounded things make mouths at us when we try to alter, but I think *this* may do:

'Ere yet the sharp decisive word  
Redden the cannon's lips, and while the sword.' "

So the line appeared in Higginson's new edition (except that the first word was changed to the indicative.) But it will also be noted that Lowell subsequently restored the original line — except for the mood.

*Line 19:* In the Private Edition the line reads *Long blown on, flames;* instead of *Bursts up in flame;*.

*Line 33:* In all versions prior to *Under the Willows* this line reads *So generous is Fate;* instead of *So bountiful is Fate;*.

#### Stanza VI.

This stanza was not in the *Ode* as originally recited, but added immediately after; it appears in all printed versions.

*Line 12:* Prior to *Under the Willows*, *mould* appears instead of *moulds*.

*Lines 29-34:* The six lines —

*His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,  
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,  
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind;  
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,  
Fruitful and friendly for all human kind,  
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.*

did not appear in the Private Edition nor the *Atlantic*; in both editions of the *Memorial Biographies* they were placed later immediately after the line *And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face*, with the last two of the six reading

*Fruitful and friendly for his humankind,  
Yet also known to Heaven and friend with all its stars.*

In the Private Edition presented to Charles Eliot Norton, Lowell wrote in his own hand a still different version of the additional lines to be inserted after *And one of Plutarch's men . . .* :

*His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind  
Thrusting to thin air through our cloudy bars,  
A sea-mark now, now veiled in vapors blind;  
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined  
With the unlaurelled ploughshare's scars,  
Fruitful & friendly for all humankind,  
friend with  
Yet also known to Heaven & ~~all its~~ stars:*

Line 39: This line — *And thwart her genial will*; — first appears in the final version.

#### Stanza VII.

Line 18: Prior to *Under the Willows* the last word is *entwreathe* instead of *intwreathe*.

Line 20: Prior to *Under the Willows* this line reads *When other crowns are cold and soon grow sere*. instead of *When other crowns grow, while we twine them, sear*.

#### Stanza VIII.

Line 24: Lowell ended his aforementioned letter to Higginson of March 28, 1867, (see page 196 *infra*) as follows:

“Item, in the eighth please make this change:

‘Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave,  
But through those constellations go  
That shed celestial influence on the brave.  
If life were but to draw this dusty breath  
That doth our wits enslave,  
And with the crowd to hurry to and fro,  
Seeking we know not what, and finding death,  
These did unwisely; but if living be,  
As some are born to know,  
The power to ennoble, and inspire  
In other souls our brave desire  
For fruit, not leaves, of Time’s immortal tree,  
These truly live, our thought’s essential fire,  
And to the saner,’ etc.

There! I won’t open the book again, or I shall write you another ode instead of mending this. But in this latter passage the metre wanted limbering a little — it was *built* too much with blank-verse bricks — and I think I have bettered it, at least to the ear.”

These additional lines were not included by Higginson. The latter subsequently wrote to Charles Eliot Norton (*Letters*, I, p. 379, note): "Apparently I begged off from them, or perhaps they were just too late. Some years afterward Lowell wrote me a letter (now lost) saying that he had kept no copy, and wished to use them. Apparently they could not be found. One of the emendations he seems to have remembered and used." As a matter of fact Higginson did find Lowell's early letter at a later date and sent him a copy of it on June 29, 1875.

It seems probable that Higginson did actually beg off from the new lines because Lowell wrote again a few days later (*Letters*, I, p. 382): "Any change in what the ear has grown wonted to is at first displeasing; but you shall do as you like with *your* copy of the 'Ode,' and of mine *farò altro governo* if, when I reprint it in a volume, I am as discontent with that passage as now. But print yours as it is and I shall be satisfied."

*Line 25:* Prior to the final collected edition the line reads *No ban of endless night* . . . instead of *No bar of endless night* . . .

#### Stanza IX.

This stanza was not read on Commemoration Day; it was written at a much later date, first appearing in *Under The Willows*.

#### Stanza X.

*Line 5:* Prior to *Under the Willows* the line reads *Dreams are those names* . . . instead of *Dumb are those names* . . .

*Lines 6-7:* In all versions prior to *Under the Willows* these two lines read

*Forceless as is the shadow of a cloud,  
They live but in the ear:*

instead of

*Dream-footed as the shadow of a cloud,  
They flit across the ear:*

#### Stanza XI.

*Line 23:* This line — *For her time of need, and then* — does not appear in the Private Edition nor the *Atlantic*; in both editions of the *Memorial Biographies* the line reads *For her day* . . . In the Private Edition presented to Norton, Lowell inserted in his hand *For her day of need & then* as in the latter.

*Line 35:* In the *Atlantic* the line reads *Banners, advance with triumph*, . . . instead of *adance*.

*Lines 47-52:* Between the lines *With room about her hearth for all mankind!* and *No challenge sends she to the elder world*, the various versions read as follows:



Private Edition —

*The helm from her bold front she doth unbind,  
Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,  
And, their heaped war-clouds furled,  
Bids her grim navies hold their thunders in:*

Atlantic —

*The helm from her bold front she doth unbind,  
Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,  
And bids her navies hold their thunders in:*

First Edition of the *Memorial Biographies* —

*The helm from her bold front she may unbind,  
Send all her handmaid armies back to spin,  
And bid her navies hold their thunders in:*

Second Edition of the *Memorial Biographies* —

*The helm from her bold front she may unbind,  
Send all her handmaid armies back to spin,  
And bids her navies, that so lately hurled  
Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in:*

*Under the Willows* (and subsequently) —

*The fire is dreadful in her eyes no more;  
From her bold front the helm she doth unbind,  
Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,  
And bids her navies, that so lately hurled  
Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in,  
Swimming like birds of calm along the unharmed shore.*

This was another change which Lowell suggested in his letter to Higginson of March 28, 1867: "On looking further I find to my intense disgust a verse without a mate in the last stanza but one, and I must put in a patch. If I had only kept my manuscript! We must read,

*And bid her navies, that so lately hurled  
Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in,*

or else the poor *world* just below will have no law of gravitation to hold itself up by. I know I had something better originally, but I can't get it back." The "something better" can here be seen, but Lowell evidently did not have a copy of his own Private Edition to which he himself could turn.

Line 55: Prior to *Under the Willows* this line reads *Plays on . . .* instead of *Plays o'er her mouth . . .*

#### Stanza XII.

Lines 6-7: The two lines

*No poorest in thy borders but may now  
Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow.*

first appear in *Under the Willows*.

*Appendix II**List of Known Recipients of the Privately Printed Edition  
of Lowell's Commemoration Ode*

<i>Number</i>	<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Present Owner</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
2	(Name erased)	Unknown	Formerly owned by William H. Lambert and by Henry E. Huntington.
3	Charles Eliot Norton ("Charles E. Norton")	Harvard College Library	Presented by an anonymous donor who bought it through Edgar H. Wells & Co. at the auction of Norton's books on May 2, 1923.
4	Josephine Shaw Lowell ("Effie")	Harvard College Library	Received in the bequest of Amy Lowell who bought it May 4, 1925, at the auction of books of Carlotta Russell Lowell, daughter of the recipient.
5	George William Curtis ("G. W. Curtis")	Parkman D. Howe	Receipt acknowledged by Curtis on September 12, 1865.
7	Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar	Sherman Hoar Bowles (a grandson of Judge Hoar)	Receipt acknowledged by Hoar on September 10, 1865.
10	Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ("H. W. L.")	Craigie House, Cambridge	
12	Henry Warren Torrey ("H. W. Torrey")	The Pierpont Morgan Library	Bears bookplate of D. F. Appleton.
13	James Walker ("Rev <sup>d</sup> . Dr. Walker")	Harvard College Library	Rebound; received in President Walker's bequest March 22, 1875.
16	Thomas Wentworth Higginson ("T. W. H.")	New York Public Library	Receipt acknowledged by Higginson on September 14, 1865; formerly owned by Stephen H. Wakeman and by Owen D. Young; received by the Library in the gift of Mr. Young and Albert A. Berg.
18	Charles William Storey ("C. W. S.")	Charles M. Storey (grandson of recipient)	
19	Estes Howe ("E. H.")	Lois L. Howe (daughter of recipient)	
20	Frederic Henry Hedge ("F. H. Hedge, D.D.")	Josiah K. Lilly, Jr.	Sold at the auction of the recipient's books on March 19, 1919; at one time owned by John A. Spoor.
22	Charles Frederick Briggs ("C. F. B.")	The Rosenbach Company	
25	Edwin Percy Whipple ("E. P. Whipple")	Yale University Library	Sold at the auction of Whipple's books on April 7, 1903; at one time owned by Owen F. Aldis and included in the gift of his books to Yale.

Number	Recipient	Present Owner	Remarks
27	Richard Grant White ("Richard Grant White, Esq.")	Chapin Library, Williams College	Receipt acknowledged by White on September 21, 1865; sold at the auction of his books in October, 1870; formerly owned by Jacob C. Chamberlain and by Walter T. Wal- lace.
28	Marcia Dunlap ("Miss Marcia Dunlap")	James F. Drake, Inc.	Sold at the auction of her books on May 25, 1933.
29	Sophia J. Townsend ("Miss Sophia J. Townsend")	Estate of Frank B. Bemis	Formerly owned by C. E. Pyser and by Frank Maier.
30	Francis Henry Underwood	Unknown	At one time owned by William H. Arnold.
33	(Name erased)	Unknown	Formerly owned by Edwin B. Hold- en and perhaps by Herschel V. Jones.
36	Jeremiah Lewis Diman ("Professor J. L. Diman")	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh	Bought for the account of Hugh F. B. Sharp at the auction of the books of Miss Louise Diman on May 24, 1932, and bequeathed by him to the National Library.
38	Robert Carter	T. E. Hanley	
39	Edward Everett Hale ("E. E. Hale")	Brown University Library	Receipt acknowledged by Hale on October 4, 1865; sold at the auction of some of his books on March 17, 1910, to Charles W. McClellan whose collection was later presented to Brown by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
43	Thomas Hughes ("Thomas Hughes, M-P")	New York Public Library	Formerly owned by Frederick W. Lehmann and by W. T. H. Howe; received by the Library in the gift of Albert A. Berg.
46	Oliver Wendell Holmes ("O. W. H.")	Edward Jackson Holmes (the Autocrat's grandson)	
47	John Holmes ("J. H.")	Carroll A. Wilson	
48	John Bartlett ("Mr. Bartlett")	Henry E. Huntington Library	Formerly owned by Frederick W. French, by William H. Buckler, by Brayton Ives, and by Judd Stewart.
?	Marshall T. Bigelow ("Mr. Bigelow")	Unknown	Formerly owned by George M. Wil- liamson, by Wm. H. Lambert, and by William Bunker; this "Mr. Bige- low" may have been John Bigelow, editor of the <i>New York Evening Post</i> , instead of M. T. Bigelow of Welch, Bigelow & Co., printers of the <i>Ode</i> .
?	Ralph Waldo Emerson	Unknown	Receipt acknowledged by Emerson on September 17, 1865.
?	Sydney Howard Gay	Unknown	Receipt acknowledged by Gay on September 16, 1865.

<i>Number</i>	<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Present Owner</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
?	Benjamin Peirce	Unknown	The recipient's grandson, Benjamin Peirce Ellis, states that this copy was presented to the Public Library of the City of Boston about 1910; it cannot now be located.
?	John Weiss	Unknown	Receipt acknowledged by Weiss on October 11, 1865.
?	Gideon Nye	Unknown	Inclusion is based on the following inscription in a copy of Nye's <i>Casual Papers upon the "Alabama" and Kindred Questions</i> , Hongkong, 1869: "To James Russell Lowell, LL.D. with Mr. Nye's Compliments in gratitude for the Commemoration Ode."
None	None	Lockwood Memorial Library, University of Buffalo	Evidently an extra, unnumbered copy; trimmed and bound as the others, however.
None	None	Hamilton Vaughan Bail	Perhaps the printer's copy; originally without binding, now in full morocco; the only large, uncut and untrimmed copy.









